

# *The Historian*

*of Hancock County*

*Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi*

*September 1995*

## SEPTEMBER MEETING

The September meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at noon on Thursday, the 21st at the Eastern Star Hall, 601 Bouslog Street, across from the side of the Highway 90 Post Office. The cost of lunch will be \$5.00, tax and tip included.

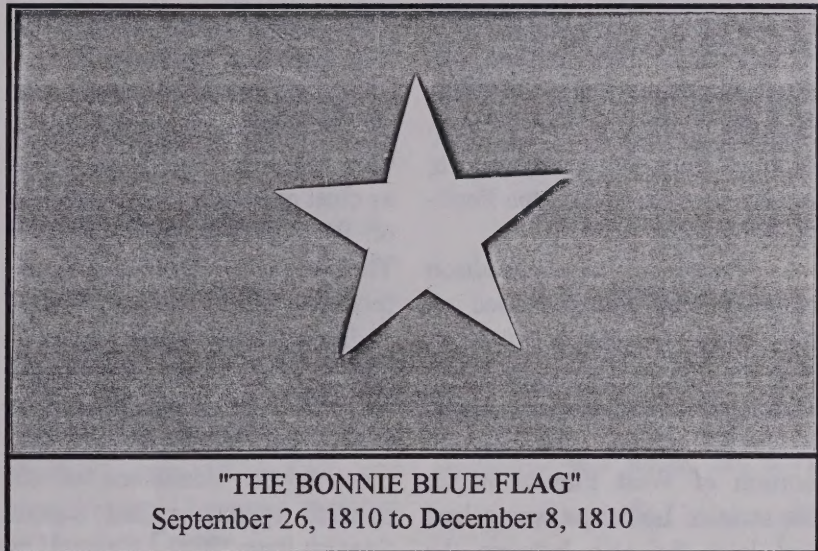
The program will be given by Melinda (Mrs. John J.) Richard on the subject of "Old Garden Roses". There is an insert in this edition of "The Historian" about her wonderful group, "Gather Ye Rosebuds".

Once again **PLEASE** telephone early for your reservations. We have to order a specific number of lunches and **PAY** for those not eaten. The ladies at the Eastern Star Hall have been most understanding but we owe them this courtesy. **Phone 467-4090**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*The Decorator House Show was a wonderful success!* For seventeen days our members, assisted by our dear friends at RSVP, Altrusa and The Bay Waveland Garden Club served as hostesses at Le Marin, (formerly known as the C. C. McDonald House). This was a truly mam-

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## THE 74-DAY REPUBLIC

Mississippi was explored in the 17th century by the Spanish, settled in the early 18th century by the French, captured by the British in 1863 and held by them for 20 years (during which time numerous Anglo-Americans moved in from the areas to the northeast), then back to Spain and finally taken over by the United States - but not until after a 74-day period as an independent state.

In 1810, the flag of the Republic of West Florida, featuring a white star on a blue field, was adopted by the rebels who drove the Spanish out of the western portion of the West Florida province. (The flag made a lasting

impression in the South, and the same design, dubbed the "Bonnie Blue Flag" was adapted for the first Texas national flag. During the Civil War, it was flown by Confederate troops, and in January 1861, the flag was hoisted atop the capital building after Mississippi seceded from the Union.)

The Republic of West Florida existed from September 26 until December 8, 1810 while awaiting annexation to the United States. The area remained a territory of the United States until December 10, 1817 when Mississippi became the 20th state.

The governor of the independent Republic was Fulwar Skipwith, a member of the convention  
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that took military action against Spain.

After the successful revolt, the U.S. immediately annexed the "Florida Parishes" to Louisiana. William C.C. Claiborne, governor of the Territory of New Orleans, created the country of Feliciana, consisting of six parishes from the Mississippi River to east of Mobile. Between the Pearl and the Mississippi Rivers was the "Parish of Viloxi." Pascagoula was the sixth parish, bounded on the east by the Perdido River.

President James Madison claimed West Florida based on the 1803 Louisiana Purchase from France, to whom Spain had relinquished Louisiana a month before the sale. In 1810, only the portion of West Florida within the state of Louisiana was seized and later the area between the Mississippi and Pearl Rivers. In 1813, the portion now including Mississippi, from the Pearl to the Perdido rivers, plus the area surrounding Mobile was taken. The remainder of West Florida was bought from Spain in 1819 and transferred to the United States in 1821.

The General Philemon Thomas Chapter of Baton Rouge of the Louisiana Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, among whose members today are descendants of the 1810 revolt, have compiled "The History of Spanish West Florida and the Rebellion of 1810, and Philomon Thomas, Patriot."

The following is derived from that document, which is available in our Society's library.

On June 21, 1810, about 500 inhabitants of Feliciana crowded on the lawns of "Egypt" plantation home to adopt a plan [of representative government] to "secure themselves against foreign invasion and domestic disturbance." The council as a whole would be invested with the general powers of government. Spanish officers then governing the territory would continue in office.

Among those petitioning the chief executive were Fulwar Skipwith, who would later serve as chief executive of the Republic of West Florida, and Philomon Thomas, who would assume military leadership.

The Spanish governor, Don de Hault deLassus, granted permission for further meetings since "the purpose of the group was to preserve the dominions of the Spanish monarchy and sustain Spanish laws."

The SAR author concludes that this "...either means deLassus was a fool, or that he was ready to make a corrupt bargain with the leaders, or that he was craftily playing for time to recruit a large force to crush them with one blow. Events seem to prove the third suspicion."

In early September, a Spanish army officer, Capt. Louis Pier-nas, appeared in Baton Rouge from Pensacola, bringing money to pay soldiers serving in West Florida. He returned to Pensacola with a letter from William Cooper, one of the delegates, exposing the convention's plans and complaining that the group sought independence and planned to strip Spain of its power.

Within weeks, troops from

Pensacola were marching towards Feliciana at the behest of deLassus who planned to stamp out the insurrection and punish the ring leaders.

On September 21 six delegates met and agreed that deLassus had outwitted them. They agreed to arm all available men and storm the fort at Baton Rouge. Col. Philomen Thomas was chosen military commander.

On the way to Baton Rouge one column of dragoons was headed by a flag-bearer with a strange banner: all blue with a single five-pointed star in the center. The flag of the Republic of West Florida had been made several days before by the wife of Major Isaac Johnson.

Thomas's army consisted of 21 mounted men from Feliciana, 44 from Springfield and 8 or 10 "patriotic gentlemen" who brought the force up to about 75.

The fort at Baton Rouge sat on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. (The fort, nonexistent today, was located just south of the present Pentagon Barracks.) It was surrounded by cypress pickets, enclosing about three acres of land. Banks of clay were thrown up behind the cypress pilings, forming a solid rampart. A ditch, 9 feet deep and 15 feet high hindered entry.

Col. Thomas saw the futility of a frontal attack on the fort. One of his officers, Larry Moore, described an opening in the cypress palisades on the river side through which milk cows were brought in and out. The horsemen entered quietly and lined up on the edge of the parade ground

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before the sentry cried out. DeLassus arrived to find his men being taken prisoner.

Thomas reported no casualties among his men, but of the governor's troops, one officer was mortally wounded, the commandant of artillery and four others badly wounded, and one private killed. "We took 20 prisoners, among them Col. deLassus. The rest of the garrison escaped by flight."

"The firmness and moderation of the volunteers who made the attack was fully equal to that of the best disciplined troops," Thomas reported. "Whole companies are daily flocking to our standard, and the harmony and patriotism prevailing in their garrison must be highly gratifying to every friend of his country." Thomas signed his letter "Commander of the Fort of Baton Rouge and Dependencies."

As soon as the convention learned of the capture of the fort, a declaration of independence was proclaimed, dated September 26, 1810. It was signed by John Rhea, president of the convention, and Andrew Steele, secretary.

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moth undertaking. We had a staff of eight to twelve people in the house from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and relief group from 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. each Thursday, Friday and Saturday for the entire time and from noon to 3 p.m. on Sunday. These wonderful ladies and gentlemen deserve our most lavish accolades for their devotion and hard work during this long period.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Our friend, Barbara Matthews for her very generous cash donation to our building fund and her continuing support of our work.

Jean and Edwin Davidson for another financial contribution. This is the latest of numerous gifts, not only money but of excellent antiques and rugs as well.

A Place Of Art which donated 10 percent of the profit from its last show in appreciation for using our facilities for their meetings.

Our friend and fellow historian, Billy Boudin for bringing us several bits of history from his own collection including a bottle from the Bay St. Louis Bottling Works, a lighter from the K&K Bookkeeping Service and "First Product" from GEH SAN and BorgWarner Chemicals facilities in Hancock County.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Fitch for paying for additional pages from the 1904 Sanborn Maps.

Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Cucullu for paying for additional pages from the 1904 Sanborn Maps.

Kelly and George Welmon for a great number of fine photos of Bay Saint Louis. One especially (of the depot) is a work of art and deserving to be a post card. We are hoping to find a sponsor to pay for it.

Alice Moseley for donating note cards of one of her paintings for sale in our shop at LeMarin.

Ray Bellande for copies of several historic articles relevant to Hancock County, and for a copy of his own book "Ocean Springs Hotels".

Elizabeth Morris Burgess in

memory of her father, Harold Robert Morris, a 1946-47 Kiln yearbook, an excellent genealogy of the Ginn family, the Morris family and some of the descendants of John Isaac Felix and Sarah Haynes.

Boyon Leshin for donating a copy of "Ghosts! Personal Accounts of Modern Mississippi Hauntings" by Sylvia Booth Hubbard, with photographs by Robert Hubbard.

## THANK YOU

*Yancy Pogue*

*and*

*Carter Church*

*delayed moving into their beautiful new home for over a month so that we might use the home for a fund raiser.*

## LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MON. 8 to 4      or by  
TUE. 8 to 4      appointment  
THU. 8 to 4

## HISTORIAN

*of Hancock County*

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Mail - POST OFFICE BOX 312  
Bay St. Louis, Mississippi 39520

OR

KATE LOBRANO HOUSE - 108 CUE STREET

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HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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